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SMALL-POX & VACCINATION.

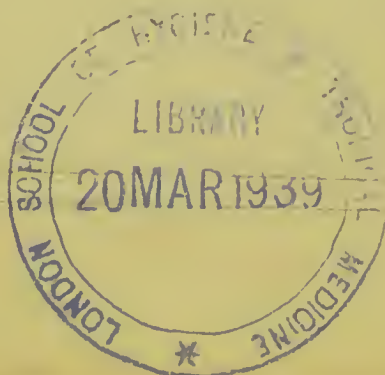
A LETTER

BY

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Small-Pox and Vaccination.

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MY DEAR FRIENDS,

For some time past it has been in my mind to address you a letter in our Parish Magazine on the subject of Small-pox and Vaccination, and the opportunity occurs now. I do not think I can deal with the subject more fairly than by giving you a chapter out of my own experience. And it is a rather remarkable thing that I have had any experience on this subject to speak about, for, whereas in the days of Queen Anne every fourth person you met was pitted with small-pox, now, thanks to vaccination, there are even many medical men who have never seen a case of this dreadful disease, and therefore a chapter out of my own experience in reference to it is more, perhaps, than might have been expected.

In the winter of 1870-1 I was curate of Madron, near Penzance. The population of the parish was something over 2,000, and the village, or "Church Town," as it is called in Cornwall, lies on a hill overlooking the far famed "Mounts' Bay." Previously to the Vaccination Act of 1871, which made vaccination compulsory, vaccination had been very much neglected in the village, and all went well until the disease was introduced. It was raging in Plymouth and Devonport at the

time, as well as in many other parts of England. And it so happened that a widow woman with her three children came from Devonport and took up her residence in the village of Madron. The children had evidently caught the infection before they left Devonport, for, directly after settling in their new house, they sickened with the disease.

Now there were living in the village an old blind man and his wife, and they had five children. Of these children, the eldest son was married with a family of his own living in the village; the eldest daughter was also married with a family of her own living in the village, and the remaining three were living with the old people, and were, a young man who had joined the Militia six months before, a lass of about 18, and a lad of about 16. These formed the family of the old man and his wife, and they were all strong, healthy people. But they had never been vaccinated. The old people had entertained a strong prejudice against vaccination, and would not have any of their children vaccinated. They now had to pay the penalty.

It so happened that this old man's eldest son lived next door to the woman with three children who had come from Devonport. He was a great, strong, healthy man, but never having been vaccinated, he was the first in the village to catch the disease from the three stranger children. I attended him as the curate of the parish. He was death stricken from the first. The disease turned into horrible confluent small-pox, he became a hideous mass

of corruption, and, shortly after, turned black as one's coat and died—leaving a widow and family behind him. The next victim was his eldest sister, also married with a family, and her case was a precisely similar one to that of her brother, and ended fatally in a short while. The youngest son and daughter of the old people then took the contagion. In their case, too, the disease assumed a dreadful confluent form, covering the whole body with a mass of corruption. But, after an awful struggle with death, they recovered, pitted and scarred all over, and never for the rest of their lives could they be what they would have been without this terrible visitation. And the remarkable part of the whole affair was that out of the old blind man's five children the only one who escaped attack was the militiaman, and the reason of this was that when he joined the militia, six months before, he was compelled to be vaccinated. Thus, out of the four attacked, two died, both leaving families; and, when it was too late, I heard the old blind man cursing his own ignorance and folly in not having had his children vaccinated. Two children died out of four attacked was a heavy price to pay for ignorance and folly, but so it was.

The disease ran through the unvaccinated village like wildfire, and you may imagine the severity of the attack when I tell you that I received a letter from the clerk of the Board of Guardians asking me to take all the funerals after nightfall to prevent crowding round the graves. Fully one in three of the cases attacked died. They almost all pursued the same course—delirium, stupor, black corruption, death.

But there were two cases, and two only, as far I could learn, of those who had been properly vaccinated being attacked. I attended them both. One was a girl of about 19, and the other a boy of about 16. The difference between their cases and those of the unvaccinated ones was very marked. In both cases the fever was very slight, with no delirium, and hardly any loss of strength. The girl did indeed go to bed, but to look at her as she lay in bed you would say there was nothing the matter. She looked rosy, fresh and well throughout, as I can testify; and although she had a few, perhaps a dozen in all, pustules, chiefly on the arms, with that peculiar depression in the centre which is the characteristic of the small-pox pustule, the attack was of the mildest, and in a short while she was all right, with her beauty unspoiled, as well as ever. The boy even did not go to bed. I may add that both my little daughter and I had been vaccinated, and were revaccinated, and both passed through the attack unscathed.

I remember seeing at the time the Government statistics of the percentage of fatal cases to those attacked among the unvaccinated and the vaccinated for the years 1861-70. They were published in the "Western Morning News," and made a great impression on me. I quote them from memory, and cannot give the exact figures, but what I say is substantially correct. In the unvaccinated cases the percentage of deaths was 33, that is about one in three of the cases died. In the vaccinated cases, of those who had one good vaccination mark, only $2\frac{3}{4}$ per cent. died. Of those who

had two good vaccination marks 2 per cent. died. Of those who had three good vaccination marks, $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. died. And of those who had four good marks $\frac{3}{4}$ per cent. died. These figures prove conclusively that vaccination is an enormous protection against small-pox, and that, the more perfect the vaccination is, the more perfect is the protection. As I can testify from personal observation there is all the difference in the world between small-pox in a vaccinated person, and in an unvaccinated one. It is not impossible for a vaccinated person to take small-pox, but there is a very high probability that he will not, and a still higher probability that if he does the disease will be of an almost infinitely milder type than if he had not been vaccinated. In the late awful outbreak at Gloucester, for four vaccinated children who took small-pox, no less than eighty unvaccinated ones took it, and in Warrington, where the disease fastened its fangs upon the workmen of a large iron works who were not protected by re-vaccination, the Workmen's Committee in charge of their Sick Fund resolved, "That any member who remains unvaccinated after Monday, Nov. 21st, 1892, shall not be entitled to any sick benefit should he be afflicted with small-pox." The result was that 1,400 of the men were re-vaccinated by the work's doctor alone, and many more by other doctors. After that, by the middle of December, there were only 12 cases among the men, and these were either men who had refused re-vaccination or who had joined the works subsequently.

The truth is that vaccination is one of the greatest boons and benefits that God has ever permitted to be discovered for the benefit of suffering humanity. It has been carried out thoroughly in Germany, where vaccination at the age of two, and re-vaccination at the age of twelve, are compulsory by law, with the result that in that country small-pox is almost exterminated. The same results may be obtained anywhere by the same means. The law in England in regard to compulsory vaccination has lately been altered by the present Government most unwisely, unworthily, and perniciously, so that, to use the expression of Professor Virchow, "the man in the street has been endowed with a medical opinion." But such treachery to and betrayal of the public health of our country is certain to exact a fearful penalty in the not distant future when the dupes of ignorance and prejudice will curse their folly, as did the old blind man at Madron. It is a wonderful law of nature that an attack of small-pox itself usually eats up and devours—neutralizes, or sterilizes as soil—that (whatever it may be) in the human system which renders that system liable to small-pox, and so, for the rest of his life, such a person is usually free from liability to take it. Jenner's immortal discovery was that vaccination with lymph taken from the vesicle of a cow suffering from cow-pox, while producing a very mild form of cow-pox, had the same effect as an attack of small-pox in sterilising that in the human system which renders us liable to small-pox, and so, as a rule, protecting us from its attack. The seed, if sown, cannot ger-

minate. The value of this merciful discovery cannot be exaggerated, and every parent ought most seriously to consider his awful responsibility, both to his child and to the community at large, before he declines to take advantage of this natural law. For it has been well said that outraged nature smites, and slays, and slays again, without pity and without mercy, until her laws are obeyed. She regards neither age nor sex, nor condition. And she makes no allowances. If a man is ignorant she regards it not; if he is prejudiced she is unconcerned; if he makes a mistake she makes no allowance for it. She pitilessly exacts the penalty until her laws are obeyed. And this is the penalty. If an unvaccinated child or person—and especially child—comes within the range of the small-pox infection the chances are fully one in two that he will take it. If he takes it, the chances are one in three that he dies. If the well vaccinated child or person comes within that range the chances are many thousands to one that he will not take it. If he does, the chances are 33 to 1 that he will recover.

And I can assure you from my own personal knowledge that if you once see a case of confluent small-pox you will never wish to see another, much less one in your own family. It is difficult to imagine any human affliction more loathsome or horrible. Are you then justified in subjecting your helpless, unconscious child to the risk of an attack from this most terrible disease when God has provided a remedy? Besides which, an unvaccinated person or child is a public danger to the community. He is unprotected, and, that being

the case, he may take the disease and become a centre of contagion to others. Every consideration of duty and obligation whether to our children or our neighbours should induce us to seek protection both for ourselves and our children. I know there are some people whom no facts can teach, and whom no arguments can convince. It is so with those who believe the earth is flat. But with a vivid recollection of what I myself have seen and known I implore you not to neglect vaccination whether for yourselves or your children. The German plan seems to yield the best results; to be vaccinated in infancy—as infants are very liable to the contagion of small-pox—and to be re-vaccinated at the age of 12 years, and whenever an outbreak occurs.

In conclusion, I may add that the dangers which might, and in some rare cases did occur from arm to arm vaccination are now no longer in existence. Glycerinated calf lymph is now invariably used, and calves are not subject to the disease which was most dreaded in the case of arm to arm vaccination. As far as anything human can be, vaccination is now absolutely safe, and a striking testimony to this fact is shown by the fact that of all classes the families of medical men are the most universally vaccinated.

Your Faithful Friend,

JEVON J. MUSCHAMP PERRY.



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